

It couldn't be more obvious to those familiar with first-century Jewish idioms and laws that the day to sacrifice the Passover was the 14th day of Nisan between noon and sundown (see the chapter "Between the Evenings"). Yet, if we accept these English translations as accurate, Jesus *would have* eaten the Passover with his disciples that night at the Last Supper, after sacrificing it on the proper 14th day. Jesus would then have been arrested, tried, and crucified on the 15th Jewish day—the special high Sabbath that always follows the 14th-day slaying of the Passover. This is what most commentators have accepted from the time of the Jewish disconnect in Rome. And this is some of what we wrestled with in class in the master's program in Bible college 30 years ago, as mentioned in this book's introduction. These two scriptures (along with the others now explained by the three keys in this chapter) clearly *seemed* to prove that the Last Supper *was* the Passover.

However, on the other side, more than 50 reasons exist (see the next chapter) why the Last Supper *could not* have been the Passover. An understanding of Jewish laws would prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that crucifying Jesus on the 15th-day special Sabbath would have been impossible. This special rest day commanded by God to commemorate the Jews' deliverance from slavery in Egypt was not a legal time to carry clubs and swords to arrest Jesus and then push for his crucifixion to occur (Matthew 26:55). Nor would that 15th-day Sabbath have been a legal time for his Jewish burial. Then there would be the conundrum of Jesus and his disciples eating regular "bread" at what we are told was the Passover (see Course 1).

A few of these points have been debated by scholars for years, with many coming to the conclusion that the Gospel of John (which tells of Jesus *being crucified as* the true Passover lamb) contradicts the other three Gospels that so clearly *seem* to show Jesus *eating* the Passover.

### How the Dative of Reference Unlocked the Door

When the Greek is translated as originally intended in Matthew 26:17 and Mark 14:12 using the dative of reference, the text in both scriptures reads "with reference to the" first day. Matthew and Mark were not saying they were currently "on the" 14th day.

One day in 2002, I was in church listening to a sermon when the pastor mentioned that Westcott and Hort's literal translation (as seen in *The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*) is often much better at staying true to the meaning of the Greek articles and prepositions than many other translations. I had not heard this before and had not previously been using the Westcott and Hort version in my studies, but since I was still learning Greek, I'd begun taking it to church to read along. After hearing his statement, I turned to the problem verses of this Bible controversy that I'd been studying intermittently for some 20 years to see if the *Interlinear Translation* could offer any hints as to the Last Supper being the Passover or not.

To my amazement I found that in *both scriptures* the Greek *Interlinear Translation* said “to the” first day (translating the Greek article τῇ), meaning “with reference to the” and not “on the” first day. This was the only Bible translation where I had ever seen this. I could barely stop myself from jumping out of my seat to go home and research it right away, for after all these years of study and searching I believed that here was finally a major key to solve this controversy. When my eye first saw “to the” in this translation I felt certain I had finally found the key to unlock these scriptures.

Below is the English translation given word for word directly under the Greek text in Matthew 26:17:<sup>283</sup>

Τῇ	δὲ	πρώτῃ	τῶν	ἄζύμων	προσῆλθον	οἱ	μαθηταὶ
<b>To the</b>	but	first [day]	of the	unfermented cakes	came toward	the	disciples
τῷ	Ἰησοῦ	λέγοντες	Ποῦ	θέλεις	ἐτοιμάσωμέν	σοι	
to the	Jesus	saying	where	are you willing	we should prepare	to you	
φαγεῖν	τὸ	πάσχα;					
to eat	the	Passover?					

The same dative article is used in Mark 14:12:<sup>284</sup>

Καὶ	τῇ	πρώτῃ	ἡμέρᾳ	τῶν	ἄζύμων,	ὅτε	τὸ	πάσχα
And	<b>to the</b>	first	day	of the	unfermented (cakes),	when	the	Passover
ἔθουον,								
they were sacrificing,								
λέγουσιν	αὐτῷ	οἱ	μαθηταὶ	αὐτοῦ	Ποῦ	θέλεις	ἀπελθόντες	
are saying	to him	the disciples	of him	Where	are you willing	having gone off		
ἐτοιμάσωμεν								
we should prepare								

ἵνα	φάγῃς	τὸ	πάσχα;
in order that	you might eat	the	Passover?

The article τῇ (“to the”) is in the Greek dative case, as are the words “first” and “day.” Here, this dative of reference means “with reference to the” first day, or “concerning

283 Westcott and Hort, from the *Kingdom Interlinear*, p. 154.

284 Westcott and Hort, from the *Kingdom Interlinear*, p. 246.

the” first day; it does *not* say it was “**on** the” first day. Despite my initial excitement when I first saw “to the,” I was uncertain as to its full meaning, since the dative of reference had never been taught in any Greek class I had attended. After searching a few Greek grammar books to no avail on what “to the” might mean, I eventually found this explained in Daniel Wallace’s *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*. His excellent book elaborates on this aspect of the dative under the subheading “Dative of Reference/Respect [with reference to],” where he explains:

Instead of the word *to*, supply the phrase ***with reference to*** before the dative. (Other glosses are *concerning, about, in regard to, etc.*)<sup>285</sup>

Here is a paraphrase of what the Greek actually means in these scriptures, using the dative of reference and considering the Jewish idioms, God’s laws, and the ritual preparations needed for this Festival:

Matthew 26:17 Now ***with reference to the*** first of the unleavened the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the Passover?

Mark 14:12 ***With reference to the*** first day of the unleavened (**the day the Passover lambs were sacrificed**), Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go to prepare the Passover?”

Or, we could just as correctly translate this dative of reference as “concerning the”:

Mark 14:12 ***Concerning the***<sup>286</sup> first day of the unleavened (**the day the Passover lambs were sacrificed**), Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go to prepare the Passover?”

Translating these scriptures using “with reference to the” or “concerning the”—instead of “on the”—retains the true meaning of this Greek dative here. It was “with reference to” these Jewish ritual purification requirements that the disciples came to

---

<sup>285</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 145.

<sup>286</sup> Although **Τη δε** in Matthew 26:17 is sometimes translated as “on the,” in Mark 14:12 only **τη** is in the actual Greek scripture, which can only be translated as “to the” (see the Greek of these scriptures above). Since Matthew 26:17 is the exact same context, it would mean that its correct translation is also “to the,” especially when bearing in mind the 50 reasons I give later as to why the Last Supper could not have been the Passover. Thus, both scriptures should be accurately translated using the Greek dative of reference.

Jesus asking where they should ritually prepare so that they may have a legal place to eat the Passover on the following 14th day.

Greek scholar William D. Mounce points out that “to” is the primary word when considering the meaning of the dative.<sup>287</sup> So if you were trying to communicate that Sam went to the store, then “to the” would be a Greek article in the dative case. If you wanted to convey that Sam sat “on the” store, then another Greek construction would be used. And Wallace’s Greek work delves deeper by identifying the dative of reference as a separate category within the dative. Thus the dative of reference gives another nuance, such that if Sam visited the store “with reference to” his bounced check, then it would be evident that the Greek article in the dative case was bringing out that aspect of “with reference to.”

Wallace also states that the King James Version is weak regarding nuances of the Greek article:

As a side note, it should be mentioned that the KJV translators often erred in their treatment of the article. They were more comfortable with the Latin than with the Greek. Since there is no article in the Latin, the KJV translators **frequently missed the nuances of the Greek article.**<sup>288</sup>

Most translators follow the same belief held by the King James translators (namely that Jesus ate the Passover at the Last Supper) and therefore they translate this Greek article as “on the.”

The Greek scholar A. T. Robertson also comments on the inaccuracy of the King James Version:

The translators of the King James Version, under the influence of the Vulgate,<sup>289</sup> handle the Greek article loosely and inaccurately.<sup>290</sup>

He continues:

The vital thing is to see the matter from the Greek point of view and find the reason for the use of the article.<sup>291</sup>

---

287 Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, p. 45.

288 Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, pp. 208–209.

289 The Vulgate is the Latin translation.

290 Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 756.

291 Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, pp. 756–757.

I would add to his statement that, when translating the Greek article, we also need to understand and accept the first-century idioms and laws of the almost exclusively Jewish writers of the Greek New Testament. If commentators believe in the tradition of Jesus eating the Passover at the Last Supper, then they would have an existing bias that would affect their English translations accordingly.

### More Dative-of-Reference Examples

Now let's see this dative of reference used in other scriptures:

<sup>NAS</sup> Romans 6:11 Even so consider yourselves to be dead **to sin**, but alive **to God** in Christ Jesus.

<sup>GNT</sup> Romans 6:11 οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς λογίζεσθε ἑαυτοὺς [εἶναι] νεκροὺς μὲν **τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ** ζώντας δὲ **τῷ θεῷ** ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

In the above verses, “to sin” and “to God” are in the dative case. An even clearer translation using the dative of reference means “dead *with reference to* sin” (or “*concerning* sin,” or “*in regard to* sin”) and “alive *with reference to*” or “*concerning* God.” However, if we translate this verse the same way that many English translations have done with Matthew 26:17 and Mark 14:12, then it would read “consider yourselves to be dead **on the** sin” and “alive **on the** God.”

Here's another example:

<sup>KJV</sup> Luke 18:31 Then he took *unto him* the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets **concerning the** Son of man shall be accomplished.

<sup>GNT</sup> Luke 18:31 Παραλαβὼν δὲ τοὺς δώδεκα εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς, Ἴδοὺ ἀναβαίνομεν εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ, καὶ τελεσθήσεται πάντα τὰ γεγραμμένα διὰ τῶν προφητῶν **τῷ** υἱῷ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

The Greek article translated as “concerning the” is in the dative case. We would not translate this verse as “all things that are written by the prophets **on the** Son of man”; the King James version translated it correctly here, bringing out the nuance of this dative of reference by saying “concerning the Son of man.” This is the same way Matthew 26:17 and Mark 14:12 should have been understood and translated.